

**Task I:**

**Communication**

**&**

**Cultural**

**Competence**



# **Module A:**

# **Effective Communication Skills**

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## Overview

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### Introduction

This module is about effective communication. Good communication is an important part of teamwork and good customer service.

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### Learning Objectives

After completing this module the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- explain why good communication is important,
  - identify behaviors that can help or hurt communication and team building,
  - identify statements that can hurt communication and some positive alternatives,
  - assess personal strengths and areas needing improvement in communication skills,
  - use techniques that improve communication with challenging staff and participants, and
  - use effective communication skills.
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*\* Words that you may not know are **underlined**. Definitions for these words can be found in the **Glossary** at the end of the module. (Note: Words are only underlined the first few times they appear in the text.)*

## Good Communication

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### Definition

Communication is the giving and receiving of messages between people.

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### Importance

Good communication is making sure that each person understands the message and that the message gets to the person in a positive way.

Good communication helps:

- participants get good customer service and
  - WIC staff work as a team.
- 

### Good Communication Helps WIC Participants

Good communication helps give participants:

- access to nutritious foods,
  - accurate and up-to-date information about nutrition, and
  - referrals to other important services.
- 

### Good Communication Helps WIC Staff

Good communication helps WIC staff:

- be more efficient, effective, and satisfied, and
  - feel less stress.
-

## How We Communicate

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### Elements of Communication

There are 6 things or elements that are part of how we communicate with others. These are:

- attitude,
- actions,
- talking,
- listening,
- appearance, and
- setting.

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### Chart of Communication Elements

The chart on the next page describes the elements of communication and how to use these elements effectively. Use the chart to guide you in your communications with staff and participants.

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### Learning Activity 1

To learn more about good communication you may want to try **Learning Activity 1** found at the end of this module.

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## How We Communicate (continued)

### Elements of Communication

<b>Element &amp; Description</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
<b>Attitude</b> How our mood comes across to people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be polite, friendly, optimistic &amp; respectful.</li><li>• Show compassion &amp; confidence.</li></ul>
<b>Actions</b> What we do while we communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make the person feel welcome &amp; comfortable.</li><li>• Be on time &amp; use time efficiently.</li><li>• Focus your full attention on the person.</li></ul>
<b>Talking</b> What words we use, what questions we ask & how we ask them, & when we talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be courteous.</li><li>• Establish trust.</li><li>• Ask appropriate questions.**</li><li>• Do not interrupt.</li><li>• Choose your words carefully. (For example, carefully choose when you will use formal or familiar words in Spanish.)</li></ul>
<b>Listening</b> How we listen & how we respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be a good listener. **</li><li>• Avoid judgmental responses.</li><li>• Help the person identify her/his feelings.</li><li>• Reassure the person that her/his feelings are okay.</li></ul>

\*\* You may want to read *Task IV - Module A: Individual Counseling Skills* for more information on asking questions, good listening skills and non-verbal cues.



## How We Communicate (continued)

### Elements of Communication (continued)

Element & Description	Suggestions
<b>Appearance</b> How we look ( <u>non-verbal cues</u> )**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Posture:</b> Lean toward the speaker. Avoid crossing arms &amp; legs.</li><li>• <b>Gestures:</b> Use open-palm gestures. Do not point, clench fist or shake fingers.</li><li>• <b>Facial expressions:</b> Nod or smile. Do not look bored or disgusted.</li><li>• <b>Eye contact:</b> Maintain eye contact only if it is culturally appropriate.</li><li>• <b>Body Language:</b> Do not fidget or act restless.</li><li>• <b>Voice:</b> Use a respectful tone that is not too loud.</li></ul>
<b>Setting</b> How the area looks & feels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure the area is clean, attractive and orderly.</li><li>• Make sure the area feels private.</li></ul>

\*\* You may want to read *Task IV - Module A: Individual Counseling Skills* for more information on asking questions, good listening skills and non-verbal cues.

## Behaviors That Affect Communication

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### **Positive or Negative Effects**

Your behavior can have a positive or a negative effect on how well the WIC program works. Participants get better service when you use good communication skills with co-workers and participants.

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### **Put Positive Behaviors into Practice**

The following behaviors can help communication and teamwork. Use these with co-workers and participants:

- show respect,
  - be polite,
  - be on time,
  - have a positive attitude,
  - listen carefully,
  - show empathy,
  - be flexible,
  - help out,
  - give compliments, and/or
  - show appreciation.
- 

### **Avoid Negative Behaviors**

The following behaviors can hurt communication. Avoid these at all costs! Do NOT:

- look “down” on others,
  - blame others,
  - gossip,
  - complain,
  - interrupt,
  - correct others, and/or
  - criticize.
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## Statements to Avoid

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### Statements Can Hurt Communication

Some statements can hurt communication. They can cause a participant or co-worker to become angry or upset.

Be aware of these statements. Avoid them when communicating with participants and co-workers.

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### Statements To Avoid

Try to avoid the making the following kinds of statements:

- using “you” messages (such as “You did not fill out this form right.” instead of “I noticed some parts of the form need correction.”)
  - giving orders,
  - using “should have” or “have to”,
  - focusing on what cannot be done, and
  - using “always” or “never”.
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### “You” Messages

Do not use “you” messages. When someone hears such a message s/he may feel blamed. No one wants to feel blamed!

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### Giving Orders

Never give orders. When someone is told what to do s/he may feel talked “down” to.

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### “Should Have” or “Have To”

Do not use statements telling the person what s/he “should have” done or “has to” do. When someone is told “you should have...” or “you have to...,” s/he may feel as though s/he is being judged or is not being given the opportunity to take responsibility.

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## Statements to Avoid (continued)

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**Focusing on What  
Cannot Be Done**

Do NOT focus on what CANNOT be done. Always focus on what CAN be done. People may become disappointed, frustrated, and/or sometimes even angry when they hear what CANNOT be done.

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**“Always” or  
“Never”**

Do not use “always” or “never”. When someone hears these words s/he may feel judged and also a need to defend her/himself.

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## Alternative Statements

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### Positive Alternatives

Carefully choose your words when you talk to co-workers and participants. Follow these recommendations when you communicate:

- use “I” messages,
- do not give orders,
- do not use “should have” or “have to”,
- focusing on what can be done, and
- be specific; do not use “always” or “never”.

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### Chart of Recommendations, What to Avoid, and Alternatives

The chart on the next page gives you a list of:

- recommendations,
- statements to avoid, and
- alternative statements to use.

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## Alternative Statements (continued)

**Chart of Recommendations,  
Statements to Avoid & Alternatives**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Statements to Avoid</b>	<b>Alternative</b>
Use “I” messages.	<i>“<b>You</b> are confusing me.”</i>	<i>“<b>I</b> am confused. Please help me understand what you mean.”</i>
Don’t give orders.	<i>“Wait here!”</i>	<i>“Would you <b>please</b> wait here while I talk to my supervisor.”</i>
Don’t use “should have”.	<i>“You <b>should have</b> eaten less fatty foods.”</i>	<i>“<b>We want</b> you to stay healthy. These recommendations will help you.”</i>
Don’t use “have to”.	<i>“You <b>have to</b> bring your proof of address.”</i>	<i>“<b>We need</b> to review your proof of address today.”</i>
Focus on what CAN be done.	<i>“It’s not part of my job.”</i>	<i>“Let me get Lynn she can help you with that.”</i>
Be specific. Don’t use “always” and “never”.	<i>“You <b>always</b> forget your medical information.”</i>	<i>You forgot your medical information on your last appointment.”</i>

## Alternative Statements (continued)

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**Learning  
Activity 2**

To learn more about what words to use when communicating with participants or co-workers you may want to try **Learning Activity 2** found at the end of this module.

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**Learning  
Activity 3**

To learn more about your personal strengths and areas needing improvement in communication you may want to try **Learning Activity 3** found at the end of this module.

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## Challenging People

### Working with Angry People

Most of the people you will work with at WIC will be friendly. Sometime you will have to communicate with someone who is grumpy or even angry. Learning to communicate well with an angry person can take extra skill.

### Ways to Deal with the Angry Person

There are some things you can do when talking to an angry person. The following lists can help guide you.

Do:	Do Not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stay calm.</li><li>• Deal with the person's feelings first by listening to what s/he has to say and putting yourself in her/his place. (Use such phrases as, "I see" or "you sound...")</li><li>• Give the person plenty of personal space by not touching her/him and not coming to close to her/him.</li><li>• Deal with the problem after feelings have been dealt with.</li><li>• Respond quickly when helping.</li><li>• Speak confidently with a calm, firm, caring tone.</li><li>• React in a professional way by taking responsibility and showing respect.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scowl, roll your eyes, or smile inappropriately.</li><li>• Touch an angry person.</li><li>• Slouch.</li><li>• Sit or stand with arms crossed.</li><li>• Chew gum or eat.</li><li>• Sigh. (This may look like you are annoyed or impatient.)</li><li>• Move slowly when responding or taking action. (This may further upset the person.)</li></ul>



## Challenging People (continued)

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### **Learning Activity 4**

To learn to use techniques that may improve communication with challenging participants or staff you may want to try **Learning Activity 4** found at the end of this module.

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### **Learning Activity 5**

To practice using effective communication skills you may want to try **Learning Activity 5** found at the end of this module.

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## Summary

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### Communication

Communication is the giving and receiving of messages between people.

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### Importance of Good Communication

Good communication is making sure that messages get to people in a positive way.

Good communication helps:

- participants get good customer service and
  - WIC staff work as a team.
- 

### Elements of Communication

We communicate by:

- attitude,
  - actions,
  - talking,
  - listening,
  - appearance, and
  - setting.
- 

### Behaviors Affect Communication

Our behavior can have a positive or negative affect on how well the WIC program works. Put positive behaviors into practice and avoid negative behaviors.

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### Improving Communication

When you communicate, choose your words carefully.

- use “I” messages,
  - do not give orders,
  - do not use “should have” or “have to”,
  - focus on what can be done, and
  - use specifics; do not use “always” or “never”.
- 

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## Summary (continued)

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### Challenging People

When dealing with an angry person:

- stay calm and
  - deal with the person's feelings first and then deal with the problem.
-

## Glossary

communication- Communication is the giving and receiving of messages between people.

customer service- Customer service is how we meet the needs of the people who use our services.

non-verbal cue- A non-verbal cue is a message that does not use words. Non-verbal cues can include facial expression, posture or eye contact. (You may want to read pages 3-4 of *Task IV - Module A: Individual Counseling Skills* for more information on non-verbal cues.)

role play- A role play is when 2 or more people act out a scene as though it was “real life”. “Props” such as baby dolls or food models are not needed but may be helpful.

teamwork- Teamwork is the working together of a group of people such as co-workers who are meeting the agency’s goals.

## Progress Check

1. Mark the following as “TRUE” or “FALSE”.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Communication is the giving and receiving of information.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good communication can help WIC staff work as a team.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good communication is not necessary for good customer service.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Our attitude and our appearance are not part of how we communicate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoiding judgmental responses is important to good communication.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Maintaining privacy is not important to good communication.

2. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help to **improve communication**.

- \_\_\_\_\_ leaning forward in chair, nodding, and smiling
- \_\_\_\_\_ listening carefully
- \_\_\_\_\_ identifying the speaker’s feelings
- \_\_\_\_\_ sitting with folded arms
- \_\_\_\_\_ chewing gum while talking
- \_\_\_\_\_ starting the session on time

## Progress Check (continued)

3. Mark the following behaviors as “P” for having a positive effect on communication or “N” for having a negative effect on communication.

\_\_\_\_\_ correcting others

\_\_\_\_\_ interrupting

\_\_\_\_\_ being flexible

\_\_\_\_\_ showing respect

\_\_\_\_\_ being polite

\_\_\_\_\_ listening carefully

\_\_\_\_\_ avoiding challenging people

4. Match the statement that you should avoid with its alternative, more positive statement.

_____ “You didn’t do this right!”	A. “I’m confused. Please clarify for me.”
_____ “You aren’t making any sense!”	B. “We want you to be healthy. Exercise helps people stay healthy.”
_____ “Sit here!”	C. “I notice that you were late to your last 3 appointments.”
_____ “You should exercise more.”	D. “Please feel free to have a seat while you are waiting.”
_____ “You always show up late!”	E. “There are a few items here that need to be changed.”
_____ “You have to bring your son’s blood test results.”	F. “We need your son’s blood test results next time.”

## Progress Check (continued)

5. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help and not hurt your communication with someone who is upset.

- \_\_\_\_\_ using “I” statements instead of “you” statements
- \_\_\_\_\_ sighing
- \_\_\_\_\_ respecting the person and taking what s/he says seriously
- \_\_\_\_\_ acting annoyed
- \_\_\_\_\_ listening carefully to what s/he says
- \_\_\_\_\_ staying calm
- \_\_\_\_\_ speaking in a caring yet firm tone
- \_\_\_\_\_ dealing with the participant’s feelings first and then the problem

## **Learning Activities**

The following activities are included and are recommended for interactive learning:

- Learning Activity 1: Looking at Communication
- Learning Activity 2: Choosing Your Words
- Learning Activity 3: Assessing Your Communication Skills
- Learning Activity 4: Challenging People
- Learning Activity 5: Role Plays



## Activity 1: Looking at Communication

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**Learning Objectives** After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- identify what is needed for good communication.

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**Instructions**

1. Arrange with your mentor or supervisor to observe one or more co-workers communicate with some participants. You will watch them:
    - greet participants as they arrive at the site,
    - assess eligibility,
    - counsel,
    - teach class, and
    - hand out food instruments.
  2. Make sure the co-worker explains to the participant that you are observing the session for training purposes.
  3. Write down your observations on the form on the next page. Note anything that seems to help communication.
  4. Discuss your observations with your mentor or supervisor.
-

## Activity 1: Looking at Communication

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Observations</b> (Note attitude, actions, talking, listening, appearance and setting.)
Greeting participants	
Assessing Eligibility	
Counseling	
Leading Class Session	
Handing Out Food Instruments	

## Activity 2: Choosing Your Words

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**Learning Objectives** After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- Change a statement that hurts communication to a statement that may help communication with participants or co-workers.

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**Instructions**

1. The next few pages contain 10 situations in which the WIC staff person has made an inappropriate statement.
  2. For each of the statements made, give a more positive alternative in the box provided.
  3. You may want to discuss your alternatives with your mentor or a supervisor.
-

## Activity 2: Choosing Your Words

1. Mary Smith, who is pregnant, is new to WIC. She seems shy and does not say much. A WIC staff person says,

***“You sure don’t say much! Why are you here?”***

**Better words:**

2. Lily Wong walks into the WIC site and is greeted by the WIC staff person who says:

***“Sit over there!”***

**Better words:**

3. Mara Brighton has not been breastfeeding her infant. A WIC staff person is counseling her and says,

***“You should have nursed your baby.”***

**Better words:**

## Activity 2: Choosing Your Words

4. Jennifer Jones has not been on time for the last 2 visits. A WIC staff person says,

***“You’re never on time!”***

**Better words:**

5. Belinda Cane asks a question about her diabetes. The WIC staff person responds by saying:

***“I’m not supposed to talk to you about diabetes.”***

**Better words:**

6. Patricia Long has worked at WIC for over 5 years and has given participant Roberta Sanchez incorrect information on transfers. A WIC staff person is aware of this and says:

***“You gave Roberta Sanchez the wrong information! You better read our policy manual on transfers.”***

**Better words:**

## Activity 2: Choosing Your Words

7. Tim Roberts is a new staff person at WIC. He tells a co-worker:

***“I can’t do that! It’s not what I was hired to do.”***

**Better words:**

8. Jeff Lode is a Health Educator at WIC who needs some help with his outreach work. He says to an R.D.:

***“You nutritionists have great ideas, but you never have time for me!”***

**Better words:**

9. Jean Pratt is a new WIC staff person who is very enthusiastic about her work. A WIC staff person notices that Jean does not always keep participant information confidential. The WIC staff person tells a co-worker:

***“Jean Pratt sure is inexperienced! Yesterday she shared confidential information about a participant in the break room!”***

**Better words:**

## Activity 3: Assessing Your Communication Skills

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**Learning Objectives** After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- identify personal strengths and areas needing improvement.

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**Instructions**

1. Observe several co-workers communicating with participants and each other.
  2. Think about how you communicate with others.
  3. Use the self-assessment form on the next page to assess your communication skills.
  4. After completing the form you may want to discuss your assessment with your mentor or supervisor. S/he may be able to help you identify how you can make improvements.
-

### Activity 3: Assessing Your Communication Skills

SKILLS	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always	COMMENTS
Do you treat people with respect? ---Do you avoid judgmental or blaming responses?					
Are you polite?					
Are you on time?					
Do you have a positive attitude? - --Do you focus on what can be done?					
Do you listen carefully? ---Do you allow time for responses & questions?					
Do you show caring & empathy?					
Do you avoid giving orders?					
Do you use "I" messages?					
Do you avoid using "should", "always", or "never"?					
Are you flexible?					
Are your messages simple & clear?					
Do you limit interruptions & distractions?					
Do you limit gossiping & complaining?					
Do you show your appreciation of others?					
<b>Specific skills you would like to work on:</b>					



## Activity 4: Challenging People

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**Learning Objectives** After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- show how to deal with challenging participants and staff.

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**Instructions**

1. The next few pages have 5 situations with challenging participants and co-workers.
  2. For each of the situations, how would you try to improve communication?
  3. You may want to try your approaches out in a role play.
  4. Discuss your approaches with your mentor or supervisor.
-

### Activity 4: Challenging People

1. *A participant comes into the WIC site angry. You are the first person she sees. She starts to scream and curse at you. You are unclear as to why she is upset. What do you say to her?*

**Your Approach:**

2. *A participant has missed her 3:00 appointment. She comes in at 4:55 and appears very upset. She tells you she needs to be seen. The site closes at 5:00. What do you say to her?*

**Your Approach:**

### Activity 4: Challenging People

3. *You are counseling a participant about breastfeeding. She does not trust anything you say. She constantly questions you and rolls her eyes at you. You are not sure she is getting anything out of the session. What do you say to her?*

**Your Approach:**

4. *A co-worker is having family problems and is spending a lot of work time chatting with co-workers. She often comes to you for moral support. You notice that you are getting behind with your work due to the conversations with her. What do you say to her?*

**Your Approach:**

### Activity 4: Challenging People

5. *A co-worker who is training you suddenly bursts out in anger. She tells you she shouldn't be training you and that she is overworked and underpaid! What do you say to her?*

**Your Approach:**

## Activity 5: Role Plays

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**Learning Objectives** After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- show how to use effective communication skills.

---

**Background** A role play is when 2 or more people act out a scene as though it was “real life”. “Props” such as baby dolls or food models are not needed but may be helpful.

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**Instructions**

1. Ask your mentor, supervisor, or a co-worker to role play any 3 of the 5 roles (A-E) described on the following page.
2. Using the information you have learned about good communication, act out the role of a WIC Nutrition Assistant for each of the 3 situations.
3. Mentor/Supervisor/Co-Worker: Using the role plays as your guide, act out the role of the participant or co-worker. Try to be as realistic as possible.
4. After each session, ask your co-worker to tell you what s/he noticed. Make sure to ask for your strengths as well as weaknesses.

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*continued on next page*

## Activity 5: Role Plays

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- Role Play A** Debbie Kendle is a 20-year-old pregnant woman who comes in with her mother. This is her first pregnancy and she is rather shy and does not say much. Her mother, however, is eager to tell you everything!
- 
- Role Play B** Maria Gomez has not followed any of the dietary suggestions you gave her last visit. She also does not speak much English. She seems to be eager to make some changes in her diet.
- 
- Role Play C** Sue Lee comes to the WIC site very upset. This is her first visit. She wipes her tears but doesn't seem able to stop crying. She says something about her boyfriend having a gun.
- 
- Role Play D** Tammy Gray, a co-worker, needs your help interpreting for a Spanish-speaking participant. You are in the middle of a session with a participant when she rudely interrupts you. She tells you it is urgent.
- 
- Role Play E** At a staff meeting Jasmine White, a co-worker, criticizes the way you handled a participant. She calls you "insensitive" and "racist".
-

## Progress Check Answers

1. Mark the following as “TRUE” or “FALSE”.

**TRUE** Communication is the giving and receiving of information.

**TRUE** Good communication can help WIC staff work as a team.

**FALSE** Good communication is not necessary for good customer service.

**FALSE** Our attitude and our appearance are not part of how we communicate.

**TRUE** Avoiding judgmental responses is important to good communication.

**FALSE** Maintaining privacy is not important to good communication.

2. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help to **improve communication**.

☒ leaning forward in chair, nodding and smiling

☒ listening carefully

☒ identifying feelings

☐ sitting with folded arms

☐ chewing gum while talking

☒ starting the session on time

## Progress Check Answers (continued)

3. Mark the following behaviors as “P” for having a positive effect on communication or “N” for having a negative effect on communication.

  **N**   correcting others

  **N**   interrupting

  **P**   being flexible

  **P**   showing respect

  **P**   being polite

  **P**   listening carefully

  **N**   avoiding challenging people

4. Match the statement that you should avoid with its alternative, more positive statement.

<u>  <b>E</b>  </u> “You didn’t do this right!”	A. “I’m confused. Please clarify for me.”
<u>  <b>A</b>  </u> “You aren’t making any sense!”	B. “We want you to be healthy. Exercise helps people stay healthy.”
<u>  <b>D</b>  </u> “Sit here!”	C. “I notice that you were late to your last 3 appointments.”
<u>  <b>B</b>  </u> “You should exercise more.”	D. “Please feel free to have a seat while you are waiting.”
<u>  <b>C</b>  </u> “You always show up late!”	E. “There are a few items here that need to be changed.”
<u>  <b>F</b>  </u> “You have to bring your son’s blood test results.”	F. “We need your son’s blood test results next time.”



## Progress Check Answers (continued)

5. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help and not hurt your communication with someone who is upset.

- ☒ using “I” statements instead of “you” statements
- ☐ sighing
- ☒ respecting the person and taking what s/he says seriously
- ☐ acting annoyed
- ☒ listening carefully to what s/he says
- ☒ staying calm
- ☒ speaking in a caring yet firm tone
- ☒ dealing with the participant’s feelings first and then the problem